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Obituary of Edward Jenner

Edward Jenner was born in the small village of Berkley in Gloucestershire, England on May 17th 1749. He was the youngest of 6 children of Stephan Jenner, a clergyman of the church of England, then at the age of five he was orphaned and was raised by his older brother who was also a clergyman just like his father was. Growing up Edward was always very interested in nature and his surroundings. Then at the young age of 13 Edward was a surgeons apprentice and continued that for about 9 years after which he moved onto St George’s hospital in London to study anatomy and surgery while working with John Hunter. John would always encourage Edward to be inquisitive and experimental with his approach to medicine, his advice to Edward was ‘Don’t think, but try; be patient, be accurate’. After completing all of his studies at St George’s hospital in 1773 Edward moved back to Berkley to set up a medical practice as a country doctor. Here he continued to use John Hunters advice and began to examine the effectiveness of cowpox as a protection against smallpox. Edward worked in a rural community where most of his patients were farmers, working with cattle etc.

In the 18th century smallpox was one of the most common diseases along with being one of the major causes of death. At this point there was only really one main treatment for small pox and this was found by Jan Ingenhaus and was brought to England in 1721 from Turkey, but this treatment usually had fatal results. Edward Jenner was the next person to discover a treatment for smallpox. Edward made his discovery final in 1796 that the inoculation with cowpox would give immunity to small pox, at this point it was a medical breakthrough and this would allow many people’s lives to be saved.

Later on in1798 Edward Jenner published his piece of writing *‘An Inquiry into the causes and effects of the Variolae Vacciae’*. At this point in time Edward Jenner had discovered the vaccination and he became the country doctor who pioneered vaccination. After discovering the vaccination he visited London to demonstrate the process of the vaccination and its results. Although he had everything correct and knew what he was talking about, not one of the medical professionals wanted to use it as a trial method. Although in other parts of Europe his Vaccinations were in high demand although the vaccine could not be transported to other countries. Some of the church men called his vaccination ‘diabolical’. No one would use his theory until one day when the Countess of Berkley and Lady Ducie got their children vaccinated. This eventually caused the medical professionals to turn around and people began to use it. Edward Jenner had always been so certain that he had even vaccinated his son 3 times.

Within 18 months of Edwards vaccination being used the number of deaths from smallpox had reduced by two –thirds in England, and this was after 12,000 people had been vaccinated. By the time 1800 came around, 100,000 people had been vaccinated worldwide. As the demand for the vaccine rapidly increased, Edward discovered that he could take the lymph from a smallpox pustule and then dry it in a glass tube which could then be used for up to three months. This allowed the vaccine to be able to be transported more around the world. Thomas Jefferson was even vaccinated by Edward Jenner and then Thomas Jefferson continued to vaccinate his family and neighbours.

After a while parliament awarded Edward with two large grants and Napoleon I had a medal struck in his honour. Edward was then invited to London for a rather large sum of money but his reply was not what they were expecting. Edward Jenner stated: "No! In the morning of my days I have sought the sequestered and lowly paths of life - the valley, and not the mountain, and now, in the evening of my days, it is not meet for me to hold myself up as an object for fortune and fame."

Edward Jenner was never accepted into the College of Physicians in London because his medical colleagues insisted that he pass a test on the theories of Hippocrates and Galen but Edward refused to do so because he believed that his discovery of the vaccination should have been good enough to get him into the college. Edward Jenner lived a very successful life and died in 1823 in his hometown of Berkley.

Sources:

<http://www.biogs.com/famous/jenner.html>

<http://www.faqs.org/health/bios/95/Edward-Jenner.html>